DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 235 403 CG 016 936

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TITLE Moral Reasoning and Personality Variables in Relation to Moral Behavior.
PUB DATE Apr 83
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Rocky Mountain Psychological Association (Snowbird, UT, April 26-30, 1983).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Attribution Theory; *Behavior Patterns; College Students; Higher Education; Moral Development; *Moral Values; Personality Development; *Personality Traits; *Predictor Variables; Self Concept; Social Cognition
IDENTIFIERS California Personality Inventory; Defining Issues Test

ABSTRACT

The relation of moral reasoning to moral behavior has been the subject of a substantial number of empirical studies; it may be more productive to employ a configuration of characteristics to predict moral behavior. To investigate the relation of moral reasoning and personality variables to moral behavior, 74 undergraduates, 30 males and 44 females, aged 18-34, were administered a moral reasoning measure, the Defining Issues Test, and a personality measure, the California Personality Inventory. The tests were administered in a group session in which the prestated time commitment was intentionally shortened to set up a moral situation that involved an informal contractual obligation. The contract stated that students were to receive course credit for completing three inventories, the third of which, due to lack of time, had to be completed at home and returned by mail. Of the 74 subjects, 57 returned the third measure, for a return rate of 77 percent. Results revealed that neither a combination of moral reasoning variables nor a combination of personality variables predicted return behavior. Rather, a combination of both moral reasoning and personality variables predicted return behavior. These variables were communality, tolerance, low dominance, achievement via independence, and a moral sense of rightness in fulfilling assigned duties. (BL)

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Moral Reasoning and Personality Variables in Relation to Moral Behavior

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CG 016936

Paper presented at the meeting of the Rocky Mountain Psychological Association; Snow Bird Village, Utah; April 1983.

Abstract

Moral Reasoning and Personality Variables in Relation to Moral Behavior

This research examined the hypotheses that: (a) moral reasoning is related to moral behavior; (b) certain personality variables are related to moral behavior; and, (c) a combination of moral reasoning and personality variables is the better predictor of moral behavior than either moral reasoning or personality variables separately.

The method involved administering a moral reasoning measure and a personality measure to 74 undergraduates. The moral reasoning measure was Rest's Defining Issues Test; the personality measure was the California Personality Inventory. These tests were administered to a subject in a group session. During a session the experimenter told subjects that he had to cut the session short, and that he had to give them a third test to take home and complete, and then return by mail. This arrangement with subjects was assumed to have a moral character partly because subjects were dismissed with the reminder that since they had received class credit for a certain amount of participation, and since they had signed up for participation, they had essentially contracted to complete all tests. The main measure of moral behavior was whether subjects returned the third test.

Results revealed that neither a combination of moral reasoning variables nor a combination of personality variables predicted return behavior. Hence the first two hypotheses were not confirmed. The third

hypothesis was confirmed. A discriminant function analysis involving a combination of moral reasoning and personality variables accurately and reliably predicted return behavior. Some of the main variables in the function represented a personality-moral reasoning pattern that was theoretically and intuitively related to return behavior. In discussing the research it was proposed that the findings suggest the importance of employing a configuration of characteristics to predict moral behavior.

Moral Reasoning and Personality Variables in Relation to Moral Behavior

Since Harthorne and May's (1928) classic studies of the relationship of moral knowledge to deceitful behavior, the relation of moral reasoning to moral behavior has been the subject of a substantial number of empirical studies. Blasi (1980) has recently reviewed this literature. A large number of these studies have in some form involved Kohlberg's (1969, 1976) cognitive developmental theory of moral development. In this theory, development of moral reasoning is viewed as progressing through an invariant sequence of six stages toward a final point characterized by abstract, rational, and equalitarian thought. Progressing from Stage 1 through Stage 6 may be thought of as growth from relatively inadequate simple concepts of fairness to more adequate complex concepts (Rest, 1979). Studies involving Kohlberg's theory, then, have sought to examine whether there is a correlation between stage of moral reasoning and moral behavior. Blasi notes that cognitive developmental theory hypothesizes a positive correlation between the two.

Blasi concluded that overall the studies he reviewed seemed to afford considerable support for this hypothesis. However, this general conclusion needed to be qualified with regard to what particular moral behaviors were studied. Thus, for example, support was strongest for the expectation that moral reasoning differs between nondelinquents and delinquents, but there was little support for the expectation that higher stage persons would resist more than others social pressure to conform

in their moral behaviors. Writing somewhat prior to Blasi's review, Mischel and Mischel (1976) suggested another type of qualification for the general conclusion that moral reasoning and moral behavior are related. These social learning theorists argued that while one can point to statistically significantly correlations between reasoning and behavior, the magnitude of these correlations does not warrant the claim for a strong link between the two. They note that the correlations obtained would allow one to predict no more than about 10% of the variance in the moral behaviors studied.

Perhaps because simple correlation studies of moral reasoning and moral behavior have not been entirely encouraging, there has been an increasing number of suggestions about new ways of viewing this relationship (Blasi, 1980; DePalma & Foley, 1975; Haan, 1975; Rest, 1979, 1982; Schellenberg, 1980). An aspect of some of these views is that it may be more productive to employ a configuration of characteristics to predict moral behavior, not just moral reasoning alone. Hence, Rest (1982) has recently proposed that an ensemble of moral reasoning and three classes of personality processes determines moral behavior.[1] Relatedly, in concluding his comprehensive review Blasi (1980) suggested that "it is possible that prediction [of moral behavior] can only be improved by including in the equation personality characteristics that are unrelated or only partly related to moral cognitive structures" (p. 40).

The present research related to Blasi's suggestion by studying a configuration of moral reasoning and personality variables in relation to moral behavior. Three hypotheses were examined. Hypothesis I was

simply that moral reasoning is related to moral behavior. Hypothesis II was that certain personality variables are related to moral behavior. In this regard, we reasoned that persons displaying moral behavior might be described by adjectives such as mature, independent, reasonable, sincere, clear thinking, organized, adaptable, considerate, efficient, and self-controlled. Our method included a personality measure that reflected these characteristics. Hypothesis III of the research was that a combination of moral reasoning abilities and personality variables is a better predictor of moral behavior than either moral reasoning or personality variables separately. This hypothesis bears directly on the tenability of Blasi's suggestion and was the major hypothesis of the study.

Examining the three hypotheses in the present research involved extending a previous study of moral reasoning and moral behavior conducted by Krebs and Rosenwald (1977). These researchers paid adult subjects a small sum of money to complete several questionnaires. Subjects were informed that because the test session had to be abbreviated unexpectedly they would do only some of the questionnaires during the test session and would need to complete the remaining questionnaires at home and then return them by mail. They then completed a basic demographic form and a short form of Kohlberg's moral development test (Kohlberg, 1964) in the test session. Upon leaving the session they were reminded that by accepting the sum of money they had contracted to return the remaining questionnaires. This feature and some other aspects of the procedure were aimed at accenting the formal contractual features of the procedure,

thereby creating a situation that had a moral character. Krebs and Rosenwald's analyses of the results entailed assessing reasoning-behavior relationships by comparing returners and nonreturners with respect to moral reasoning stage. These analyses yielded a significant relationship between reasoning and behavior since proportions of returners and nonreturners were significantly different for subjects at Stages 1 and 2 versus subjects at Stages 3 and 4: nonreturners tended to be at the two lower stages while returners tended to be at the two higher stages. The largest percentage of returners was at Stage 4 while only one nonreturner was at this stage.

Extending the Krebs-Rosenwald research in the present study entailed using a larger sample and giving subjects extra course credit points for their participation rather than money. The present study also employed another widely used measure of moral reasoning instead of the Kohlberg instrument. The major change, however, entailed including the personality measure in the present method in order to assess the personality variables that were involved in the second and third hypotheses.

Method

Subjects

The subjects were 74 undergraduates from Fort Hays State University. They ranged from ages 18 to 34 years; 30 were male and 44 were female. Their participation was voluntary. However, they were given the extra course points for their participation by previous arrangement with their instructors.

Measures

The instruments used were a measure of moral reasoning, two personality measures, a form for obtaining demographic information, and assessments of moral behavior. The measure used to assess moral reasoning was the short form of Rest's (1974) Defining Issues Test (DIT). The DIT is the most widely used measure of moral reasoning for college age and older populations and has been relatively well validated and found to be adequately reliable (Rest, 1979). In this test subjects are presented with hypothetical moral dilemmas. After each dilemma the subject makes a response that indicates his or her resolution of it in terms of their hypothetical behavioral choice. Next the subject rates twelve rationale sentences as to their importance in resolving the dilemma. Finally, the subject selects and rank orders in importance four of the rationale sentences. Three types of indices of moral reasoning scores can be obtained from these final rankings. In the present study the main index used entailed computing six different stage scores for a subject.[2] These scores represent the relative amounts of each stage of reasoning that the subject used when responding to the dilemmas. The stages are identified as 2, 3, 4, 5a, 5b, and 6 and correspond very closely to the Kohlberg stages (Stage 2 through Stage 6).

The personality measure used to assess the personality variables involved in the second and third hypotheses was the California Psychological Inventory (CPI). This test was developed by Gough (1975) and was recommended in the Eighth Mental Measurements Yearbook as potentially highly useful "in investigations of more basic research areas such as interactionism and moral development" (Gynther, 1978,

p. 736). The CPI consists of 480 true/false items; scoring of the items yields standardized scores on 18 different personality scales.

The second personality measure, together with the demographic form, was composed specifically for the present research. The second measure, referred to as the Adams Personality Inventory (API), consisted of 228 true/false items and was included primarily for the purpose of obtaining moral behavior measures in the context of the present research procedure.

In summary form, the procedure first entailed administering the demographic form, the DIT, and the CPI to subjects during a single test session. Subjects were instructed to take the API home, complete it, and then return it by mail. Although this procedure yielded three indices of behavior, the main index used was simply whether or not subjects returned the API within a requested time. A detailed description of the procedure follows.

Procedure

Subjects were solicited from classes with a somewhat vague and brief description of the study. They were told that all volunteers would receive extra class credit points for two hours of participation and that they could expect to spend from 1½ to 2 hours to complete some psychological tests.

The format for the test session closely followed that used in the Krebs-Rosenwald (1977) procedure. The experimenter informed subjects that the purpose of the research was to explore redundancy among social/personality scales in order to see if they could be combined into one composite questionnaire. The importance of completing all questionnaires

accurately was stressed. It was mentioned that the research was part of the experimenter's thesis and that subjects were contributing to his being able to finish the research and graduate at the end of the semester.

After the introductory remarks, the experimenter stated that he had some difficulty reserving the room. He informed subjects he had recently been told that he could only use the room 90 minutes at the most due to scheduling problems. It was announced that only the two questionnaires that are more time consuming to score (the DIT and the CPI) and the demographic data form could be given in the session. It was emphasized, however, that the experimenter needed to have data from all questionnaires in order to complete the necessary analyses. The API was given to subjects to take home, complete, and then return in self-addressed stamped envelopes that were passed out. The experimenter explained that he felt this was the only way he could collect all the necessary data.

Before subjects left, the experimenter stated since it was not their fault that the testing session had to be cut short, they would still receive extra credit for the full two hours as they were originally promised. It was made clear though, that the experimenter was trusting them to complete the third test (which would take no longer than 30 minutes) and return it as soon as possible and definitely by a date seven days from the test session date. Emphasis was put on the absolute essentiality that the subjects thoughtfully complete the third test so that the results would be useful. It was said that the API tests must be received as soon as possible so that they could be scored and so

that the final data analyses could be done.

The subjects were dismissed with a reminder that since they signed up to participate and would get class credit for two hours worth of participation, they essentially contracted to complete all of the test materials and not to do so would jeopardize the experimenter's chances of completing his thesis. Finally, the subjects were thanked and assured that regardless of whether or not it would be possible for them to return the API within a week, the experimenter would report that everyone in attendanceshould get the full two hours worth of extra credit. As in the Krebs-Rosenwald study, an overall aim of the procedure was to create a moral situation that involved an informal contractual obligation.

Results

Of the 74 subjects a total of 57 returned the API. This return rate of 77% was identical to that reported by Krebs and Rosenwald (1977). Of those returning the API, 54 returned this test by the requested seven-day time period. These subjects were regarded as returners; the remaining 20 subjects were regarded as nonreturners.

The maximum possible number of subjects was used for testing each of the three hypotheses. This maximum n was different in testing each hypothesis because some subjects had incomplete or partially valid data on some tests. Determination of test validity for subjects was made according to guidelines printed in the scoring manuals (Rest, 1974; Williams, 1981). Of the 74 subjects, 53 had valid DIT's and 68 had valid CPI's.

The main test of each hypothesis involved using a stepwise discriminant function analysis (Nie, Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner, & Bent, 1975).

In this procedure moral reasoning variables (Hypothesis I), personality variables (Hypothesis II), and a combination of moral reasoning and personality variables (Hypothesis III), were entered into the respective analyses in order to determine whether the variables were related to moral behavior in such a way that a prediction equation could significantly discriminate returners from nonreturners. In each of these analyses the classification of the subjects into predicted return and nonreturn groups involved using the more conservative Bayesian adjustments. These adjustments require that prior probabilities be proportional to the number of cases in each actual group. This reflects a consideration for behavioral base rates.

Hypothesis I

The DIT stage scores were entered as six different predictor variables of a discriminant function analysis in order to test this hypothesis. The resulting prediction equation included two of the variables, Stage 4 scores and Stage 6 scores. However, the canonical correlation of .32 associated with the function was nonsignificant, F (2, 50) = 2.84, p = .07); the hit rate (percentage of cases correctly classified using the equation) was 73.58%. This nonsignificant finding represents a failure to confirm Hypothesis I and to replicate the Krebs-Rosenwald finding of a significant relationship between moral reasoning stage and return-nonreturn behavior.

Hypothesis II

Testing this hypothesis entailed entering the standardized CPI scale scores into a discriminant function analysis of 18 different predictor variables. The resulting equation involved four of these variables:

Achievement via Independence, Communality, Dominance, and Tolerance. The canonical correlation of .34 associated with this equation was nonsignificant, F (4, 63) = 2.12, p = .09; the hit rate was 73.53%. This nonsignificant finding fails to confirm the second hypothesis.

Hypothesis III

A discriminant analysis involving all DIT stage scores and CPI scale scores as predictors was computed in order to test the hypothesis that a combination of moral reasoning and personality variables is the better predictor of moral behavior than either moral reasoning or personality variables alone. This hypothesis was confirmed. The same six variables that entered into the two previous nonsignificant equations also entered into this prediction equation. The obtained canonical correlation of .61 associated with this equation was highly significant, F (6, 45) = 4.36, p = .0015. The hit rate was 86.54%, with the improved prediction primarily being in classifying more of the nonreturners correctly. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 1, together with descriptive statistics for those variables involved in the significant prediction equation.

Discussion

It is meaningful to consider these findings in two ways. First, it is of interest to examine the psychological meaning of the significant discriminant equation obtained in the analysis for Hypothesis III. Second and perhaps more important, it is useful to consider the pattern of findings for all three hypotheses in terms of their implications for studying relationships between moral reasoning and moral behavior.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Results of the Discriminant Function Analysis for Hypothesis III

Variable entering in equation[a]	Means and standard deviations[b]		r with return/ nonreturn	Standardized coefficient	Wilks' lambda
	Nonreturners	Returners			
(1) Communality	55.46 (6.77)	50.15 (7.69)	-.30*	.71	0.911
(2) Tolerance	32.31 (12.57)	36.67 (12.27)	.15	-1.46	0.839
(3) Dominance	51.92 (11.30)	46.38 (8.46)	-.26*	.62	0.742
(4) Stage 4	9.62 (3.75)	11.90 (4.20)	.24*	-.42	0.698
(5) Achievement via Independence	38.15 (9.72)	39.46 (10.95)	.05	.84	0.663
(6) Stage 6	1.31 (1.60)	.62 (1.11)	-.24*	.37	0.632

[a]The variables are listed in the order in which they entered into the equation.

[b]Standard deviations are in parentheses. Nonreturner $n = 13$; returner $n = 39$.

*$p < .05$

In examining the meaning of the Hypothesis III equation it is necessary to consider the extent to which each variable contributed to the discriminant power of the function. As shown in Table 1, Communality was the single best measure for discriminating returners from nonreturners inasmuch as it was the first variable that entered into the equation. The unique discriminant power of each of the succeeding variables in the equation can be assessed by the extent to which Wilks' lambda decreased with the entry of each variable. On the basis of these decrements, Tolerance and Dominance made the strongest contributions to the discriminant power of the function, Achievement via Independence and Stage 6 made much smaller contributions, and the Stage 4 contribution fell somewhere between that of these pairs of variables.

Considering only the four most discriminating variables in the equation, the psychological relevance of the variables to return-nonreturn behavior seems most readily apparent for Stage 4 moral reasoning. In Kohlberg's theory Stage 4 concepts about what is morally right involve "fulfilling the actual duties to which you have agreed" (Kohlberg, 1976, p. 35). Given that the research procedure involved subjects in an informal contractual obligation to return the API, it is theoretically reasonable that Stage 4 reasoning would tend to prompt return of this test. With regard to the personality variables, returners (compared to nonreturners) tended to score higher on Tolerance and lower on Dominance (see means and correlation coefficients in Table 1). Persons scoring high on the Tolerance scale tend to be seen as that (tolerant); persons scoring low on the Dominance scale tend to be seen as retiring. Especially when combined with the concept of fulfilling one's duties, it seems intuitively sensible that an accepting tolerance and being retiring would tend to be predisposing features for return behavior. On the other hand, the psychological

relevance of Communality to return-nonreturn behavior is puzzling. The purpose of this scale is to indicate the extent to which a person's responses on this test correspond to the modal ("common") pattern on the test. From the standpoint of psychological meaning, it does not seem readily apparent why this variable turned out to be the best single predictor of return behavior.

Such interpretative difficulties, together with the related fact that the makeup of the Hypothesis III function was not entirely anticipated, accents the need for cross-validation work. However, these difficulties should not detract from the implication that the pattern of results for all three hypotheses appears to have for the study of relationships between moral reasoning and moral behavior. First, the failure to confirm Hypothesis I and Hypothesis II points to limits on the generality of the notion that moral behavior can be predicted on the basis of either moral reasoning or personality variables employed separately. Second, the confirmation of Hypothesis III points to the tenability of Blasi's (1980) suggestion that moral behavior might be better predicted by a configuration of characteristics that includes personality as well as moral cognitive variables.

Notes

This paper is based on a master's thesis by the first author. The second author directed the thesis and the third author served on the thesis committee. Address all correspondence to Stephen R. Dras; Department of Psychology; 209 Burnett Hall; University of Nebraska; Lincoln, Nebraska 68588-0308.

[1]In the usage of this paper personality processes or variables does not include moral reasoning processes or variables. This is for convenience of expression and is common usage among workers in the area of moral reasoning.

[2]Thanks are extended to James R. Rest for advising us that these stage scores might be used as an index in the present study.

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